

Definition of the Spectrum of Prevention Strategies

Influencing Policy and Legislation:

Legislation and other policy initiatives have proven to be among the most effective strategies for achieving broad public health goals. Both formal and informal policies have the ability to affect large numbers of people by improving the environments in which they live and work, encouraging people to lead healthy lifestyles, and providing for consumer protections.

Changing Organizational Practices:

Changing organizational practices involves modifying the internal policies and practices of agencies and institutions. This can result in improved health and safety for staff of the organization, better services for clients, and a healthier community environment. Advocating for organizational change at agencies such as law enforcement, schools and health departments can result in a broad impact on community health.

Fostering Coalitions and Networks:

Coalitions and networks, composed of community organizations, policy makers, businesses, health providers and community residents working together, can be powerful advocates for legislation and organizational change. Coalitions and networks also provide an opportunity for joint planning, system-wide problem solving and collaborative policy development to ensure that the voices of all community sectors are represented in public health prevention programs. Health departments must be willing to meet with communities and share the agenda, prioritizing community concerns as well as health department goals.

Educating Providers:

This strategy reaches an influential group of individuals "in and out of the health field" who have daily contact with large numbers of people at high risk for injury and disease. By educating providers to identify and intervene in public health issues, professionals, paraprofessionals and community activists working with the public can become front-line advocates for public health. Providers can encourage adoption of healthy behaviors, screen for health risks, contribute to community education, and advocate for policies and legislation.

Promoting Community Education:

The goals of community education are to reach the greatest number of individuals possible with health education messages, as well as to build a critical mass of people who will become involved in improving community health. Media advocacy "the use of mass media to shape the public's understanding of health issues" is an important part of community education campaigns.

Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills:

This band of the Spectrum represents a classic approach of public health. Public health nurses, health educators and trained community members work directly with clients in the home, community settings or in clinics, providing health information to promote child and family health. Some also work with seniors to maintain well-being and independence.